

**Photograph of Chinese Women Voting
Will Be a Suffrage Campaign Issue**

aged 18, of Rice's Landing, is in the McKensport Hospital. He is a son of George Mill.

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MOLLY McDONALD

A TALL OF THE FRONTIER



By **RANDALL PARRISH**
Author of "Keith of the Border," "My Lady of Doubt," "My Lady of the South," etc., etc.

Illustrations by **V. L. Barnes**

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There was but one course for Hamilton to pursue. He had no trail to follow, only a vague suspicion that those plotters were to some way concerned in the mysterious disappearance. Thus far, however, they had left behind no clue to their participation. Moreover he was seriously handicapped by ignorance of any motive. Why should they desire to gain possession of the girl? It could not be money, or the hope of ransom. What then? Was it some accident which had involved her in the toils prepared for another? If so, were those unexpected orders for Major McDonald a part of the conspiracy, or had their receipt complicated the affair? The Sergeant was a soldier, not a detective, and could only follow a straight road in his investigation. He must circle widely until he found some trail to follow as patiently as an Indian. There would be tracks left somewhere, if he could only discover them. If this was a hasty occurrence, in any way an accident, something was sure to be left uncovered, some slip reveal the method. He would trace the movements of the father first, and



"I Am Not in Charge of Miss McDonald."

then search the saloons and gambling dens for the two men. Though unsuccessful with Mrs. Dupont, he knew how to deal with such as they.

The stage agent was routed out of bed and came to the door, revolver in hand, startled and angry.

"Who?" he repeated. "Major McDonald? How the hell should I know? Some officer went out—yes; heavy set man with a mustache. I didn't pay any attention to him; had government transportation. There were two other passengers, both men, ranchers, I reckon; none in the station at all. What's that, June?"

A woman's voice spoke from out the darkness behind.

"Was the soldier asking if Major McDonald went East on the coach, Sam?"

"Sure; what do you know about it?"

"Why, I was outside when they started," she explained, "and the man in uniform wasn't the Major. 'I know him by sight, for he's been down here a dozen times when I was at the desk. This fellow was about his size, but dark and stoop-shouldered.'"

"And the other?" asked Hamilton eagerly.

"I didn't know either of them, only I noticed one had a black beard."

"A very large, burly fellow?"

"No, I don't think so. I didn't pay special attention to any of them, only to wonder who the officer was, 'cause I never remembered seeing him here before at Dodge, but, as I recollect, the fellow with a beard was rather undersized; had a shaggy buffalo-skin cap on."

Plainly enough the man was not Dupont, and McDonald had not departed on the stage, while some other, pretending to be his, possibly wearing his clothes to further the deceit, had taken the seat reserved in the coach. Baffled, bewildered by this unexpected discovery, the Sergeant swung back into his saddle, not knowing which way to turn.

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Dead Body.

That both McDonald and his daughter were involved in this strange puzzle was already clear. The disappearance of the one was as mysterious as that of the other. Whether the original conspiracy had centered about the Major, and Miss Molly had merely been drawn into the net through accident, or whether both were destined as victims from the first, could not be determined by theory. Indeed the Sergeant could evolve no theory, could discover no purpose in the outrage. Convinced that Dupont and his wife were the moving spirits, he yet possessed no satisfactory reason for charging them with the crime, for which there was no apparent object.

Nothing remained to be done but search the town, a blind search in the hope of uncovering some trail. That crime had been committed—either murder or abduction—was evident; the two had not dropped thus suddenly out of sight without cause. No did it seem possible they could have been

whisked away without leaving some trace behind. The town was accustomed to murder and sudden death; the echo of revolver shots would create no panic, awaken no alarm, and yet the place was small, and there was little likelihood that any deed of violence would pass long unnoticed. With a few words of instruction, and hasty descriptions of both Dupont and Connor, Hamilton sent his men down the straggling street to drag out the occupants of shack and tent, riding himself to the blazing front of the "Poodle Dock."

Late as the hour was, the saloon and the gambling rooms above were all crowded. Hamilton plunged into the mass of men, pressing passage back and forth, his eyes searching the faces, while he eagerly questioned those with whom he had any acquaintance. Few among them could recall to mind either "Rab" or his boon companion, and even those who did retained no recollection of having seen the two lately. The bartenders asserted that neither man had been there that night, and the dealers above were equally positive. The city marshal, encountered outside, remembered Dupont, and had seen him at the hotel three hours before, but was positive the fellow had not been on the streets since. Connor he did not know, but if the man was Major McDonald's driver, then he was missing all right, for Captain Barrett had to employ a liveryman to drive Mrs. Dupont back to the fort. No, there was no lady with her; he was sure, for he had watched them get into the carriage.

The troopers were no more fortunate in their remits, but had succeeded in stirring up greater excitement during their exploration, several frate individuals, roughly aroused from sleep, exhibiting fighting propensities, which had cost one a blackened eye, and the other the loss of a tooth. Both, however, had enjoyed the occasion, and appeared anxious for more. Having exhausted the possibilities of the town, the soldiers procured lanterns, and, leaving the horses behind, began exploring the prairie. In this labor they were assisted by the marshal, and a few aroused citizens hastily increased into a posse. The search was a thorough one, but the ground nearby was so cut up by hoofs and wheels as to yield no definite results. Hamilton, absorbed with the belief that whatever had occurred had been engineered by Dupont, and recalling the fact that the man was once a ranchman somewhere to the southward, jumped to the conclusion that the fellow would naturally head in that direction, seeking familiar country in which to hide. With the two troopers he pushed on toward the river, choosing the upper ford as being the most likely choice of the fugitives. The trampled mud of the north bank exhibited fresh tracks, but none he could positively identify. However, a party on horseback had crossed within a few hours, and, without hesitation, he waded out into the stream.

The gray of dawn was in the sky as the three troopers, soaked to the waist, crept up the north bank and studied the trail. Behind them the yellow lantern still bobbed about between the river and town, but there was already sufficient light to make visible the signs underneath. Horsemen had climbed the bank, the hoof marks yet dripping with water had drained from dripping fetlocks, and had instantly broken into a jog. A moment's glance proved this to Hamilton as he crept back and forth, scrutinizing each hoof mark intently.

"Five in the party," he said soberly. "Three mustangs and two American horses, cavalry shed. About three hours ahead of us." He straightened up, his glance peering into the gray mist. "I reckon it's likely our outfit, but we'll never catch them on foot. They'll be behind the mud-dunes before this. Before we go back, boys, we'll see if they left the trail where it turns west."

The three ran forward, paying little heed until they reached the edge of the ravine. Here the beaten trail descended sharply to the right. Fifty feet beyond, the marks of horses' hoofs appeared on the sloping bank. Hamilton sprang down to where the marks disappeared around the edge of a large bowlder. His hand on the stone, he stooped suddenly with quick indrawing of breath, staring down at a motionless figure lying almost at his feet. The man, roughly dressed, lay on his face, a bullet wound showing above one ear, the back of his neck caked with blood. The Sergeant, mastering his first sense of horror, turned him over and gazed upon the ghastly face of Major McDonald.

"My God, they've murdered him here!" he exclaimed. "Shot him down from behind. Look, men. No blood back, and don't miss up the tracks. There are foot-prints here—Indians, by heaven! Three of them Indians!"

"Some plainmen wear moccasins," "They don't walk that way—look at 'em; see this hair in McDonald's fingers—that's Indian, sure. Here is where a horse fell, and slid down the bank. Isn't that a bit of broken feather caught in the bush, Carroll? Bring

it over here."

The three bent over the object.

"Well, what do you say? You men are both plainmen."

"Cheyenne," returned Carroll promptly. "But what the hell are they doing here?"

Hamilton shook his head.

"It will require more than guessing to determine that," he said sternly. "And there is only one way to find out. That fellow was a Cheyenne all right, and there were three of them and two whites in the party—see here; the prints of five horses ridden, and one animal led. That will be the one McDonald had. They went straight up the opposite bank of the ravine. If they leave a trail like that we can ride after them full speed."

Carroll had been bending over the dead officer and now glanced up.

"There's sand just below Sergeant," he said. "That's why they are so damn reckless here."

"Of course; they'll hide in the dunes, and the sooner we're after them the better. Wade, you remain with the body; Carroll and I will return to the fort and report. We'll have to have more men—Wasson if I can get him—and equipment for a hard ride. Come on, Jack."

They waded the river, and ran through the town, shouting their discovery to the marshal and his posse as they passed. Twenty minutes later Hamilton stood before the Colonel, hastily telling the story. The latter listened intently, gripping the arms of his chair.

"Shot from behind, hey?" he ejaculated, "and his clothing stolen. Looks like a carefully planned affair. Sergeant; sending that fellow through to Ripley was expected to throw us off the track. That's why they were so careless covering their trail; expected to have several days' start. It is my notion they never intended to kill him; had a row of some kind, or else Mac tried to get away. Any trace of the girl?"

"No; but she must have been there."

"So I think; got mixed up in the affair some way, and they have been compelled to carry her off to save themselves. Do you know why they were after Mac?"

"No, sir."

"Well, I do; he carried thirty thousand dollars."

"What?"

"He was acting paymaster. The money came in from Wallace last evening, and he was ordered to take it to Ripley at once."

Hamilton drew in his breath quickly in surprise.

"Who knew about that, sir?"

"No one but the Adjutant, and Major McDonald—not even the orderly."

The eyes of officer and soldier met.

"Do you suppose he could have told her?" the former asked in sudden suspicion.

"That would be my theory, sir. But it is useless to speculate. We have no proof, no means of forcing her to confess. The only thing for us to do is to trail those fugitives. I need another man—a scout—Wasson. If he can be spared—and rations for three days."

The Colonel hesitated an instant, and then rose, placing a hand on Hamilton's arm.

"I'll do it for Miss McDonald, but not for the money," he said slowly. "I expect orders every hour for your troop, and Wasson is detailed for special service. But damn it, I'll take the responsibility—go on, and run those devils down."

Hamilton turned to the door; then wheeled about.

"You know this man Dupont, Colonel?"

"Only by sight."

"Any idea where he used to run cattle?"

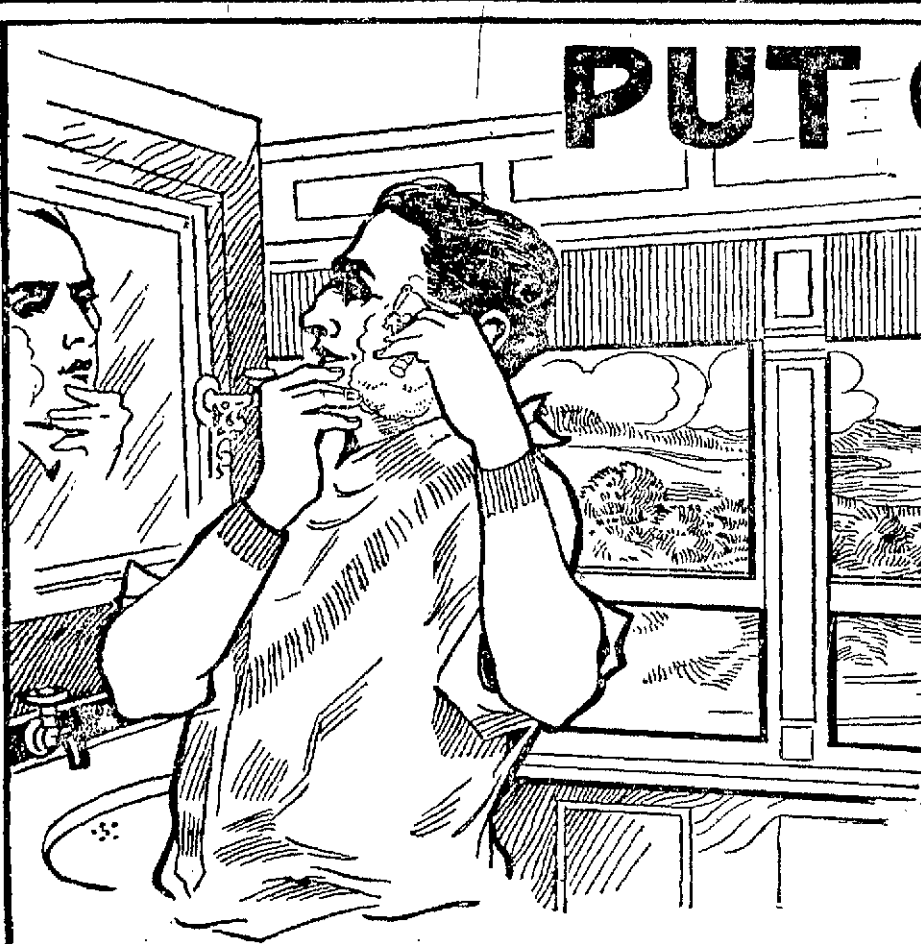
"Wait a minute until I think. I heard McDonald telling about him one night at the club, something Mrs. Dupont had let slip, but I didn't pay much attention at the time. Seems to me, though, it was down on the Canadian. No, I have it now—Buffalo Creek; runs into the Canadian. Know such a stream?"

"I've heard of it; in west of the North Fork somewhere."

"You think it was Dupont, then?"

"I haven't a doubt that he is in the affair, and that the outfit is headed for that section. I don't know, sir, where those Indians came from, or how they

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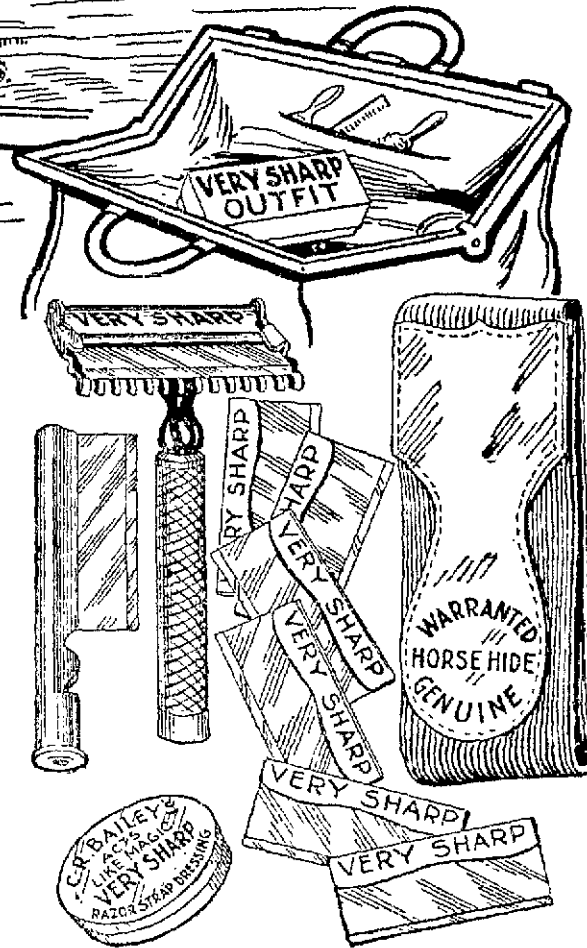
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The oyster rather lives on drink, But not the sort that turns the nose And makes the drinker gaily wrink Or fills him full of varied woes. It quaffs hot water, naught would move It to a swallow that was molasses.

Hence prohibitionists approve The oyster.

The oyster never cares to roister. It always keeps the best of hours in quietude and peace at home. Its disposition never soured. Its meditations never ceased. It is no screw-and-trouble-holster—So praise, all advocates of peace, The oyster.

The oyster never answers back. In gossip it does not indulge, though it were placed upon the rack. Its knowledge it would not divulge. Contentedly its days 'twould end. Serene within its humble cloister—I'm sure all of us should commend The oyster.

Effective Plan.

"I wish I knew some plan to get the audience to leave the house earlier than it does," said the manager of the theater. "The people linger in their seats and in the aisles for half an hour after the show is over, and the expense for lights counts up during the season."

"Why don't you," asked the experienced friend, "have a line printed on the program, reading: 'Be sure to hold your seats until after the grand finale.'"

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OB

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